The Pornographer

1999 · 1 HR 29 MIN · R

In the 1990s, audiences showed they were curious about the inner workings of the porn industry, and filmmakers attacked the subject in ways ranging from grandiose epic to frivolous satire. THE PORNOGRAPHER gives a fleshed out psychological profile of the customer, as well as the purveyor.

Rating: ★★★★☆

In the 1990s, audiences showed they were curious about the inner workings of the porn industry, and filmmakers attacked the subject in ways ranging from grandiose epic (Paul Thomas Anderson's BOOGIE NIGHTS) to frivolous satire (Trey Parker's ORGAZMO). But the topic is at its least glamorous in Doug Atchison's THE PORNOGRAPHER, which gives a fleshed-out psychological profile of the customer, as well as the purveyor.

Actually, the two become one in the character of Paul (Michael DeGood), whose genuine desire to date nice women gets mangled by a succession of unlucky rejections, indirectly transforming him from porn aficionado to auteur. Paul feeds off the false high of being accepted by the adult video community, and lets most of his remaining morals erode away, while still seeking a twisted version of real love. DeGood makes a good everyman, giving a complex performance that makes it impossible to demonize his character for behavior that often carries a harsh stigma.

His attempts to find a real girlfriend have a heartbreaking earnestness, and the rest of what happens seems an inevitable offshoot of that disappointment. Craig Wasson, who looks and acts like a mixture of Bill Maher and Jerry Springer, is perfectly cast as the porn king who takes Paul in, refusing to let the role slip into caricature. Katheryn Cain's naïve hopeful is also powerfully rendered. Apart from a heavy-handed ending that strains credibility, the details of THE PORNOGRAPHER feel right, which makes for a thought-provoking film.

© 2020 CBS Interactive Inc. All rights reserved.

Privacy Policy Ad Choice Terms of Use Mobile User Agreement